

(Washington, D.C.) – U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (NJ-12) and Sen. Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ) today announced that they have introduced, in both the House and the Senate, the Foreign Language Education Partnership Program Act, which would support revolutionary classroom programs that provide carefully sequenced foreign language classes from kindergarten through high school.

“Because of poor foreign language education, American companies today lose international contracts, our scientists miss important opportunities for collaboration, and clues critical to our national security go untranslated,” Holt said. “We need to dramatically improve how our children learn languages by establishing a foundation at the earliest ages and building on it through high school, college, and beyond.”

"The best way for our young people to master a foreign language is to start at an early age and continue learning throughout their education. This legislation seeks to create more aggressive language programs that will help close the language gap for American students," Lautenberg said. "If more Americans are fluent in languages from around the world, the United States will be better prepared to compete in a global market and protect our national security."

Research indicates that language education beginning in primary school and continuing through high school is the best way to introduce a child to a foreign language. According to the U.S. Department of Education, however, only 44 percent of American high school students are enrolled in foreign language classes, and only 31 percent of American elementary schools even offer foreign languages.

To address these problems, the bill would create a new K-12/higher education foreign language education partnership program. It would provide up to \$50 million in annual funding for model programs of sequenced foreign language instruction from K-12, with the goal of graduating high school students with an advanced level of proficiency. Any foreign language is eligible, but the Secretary of Education may establish priorities on languages critical to national needs.

Information on successful programs and practices will be widely disseminated, with a goal of encouraging school systems nationwide to adopt similar approaches.

Holt's bill will be referred to the U.S. House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education, of which Holt is a member. It is cosponsored by Reps. David Wu (D-OR), Pedro R. Pierluisi (D-PR), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Jared Polis (D-CO), Raúl M. Grijalva (D-AZ), Silvestre Reyes (D-TX), and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL). Lautenberg's bill is cosponsored by Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-HI).

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